

# CENTREVILLE ILLINOIS

S T O O K E

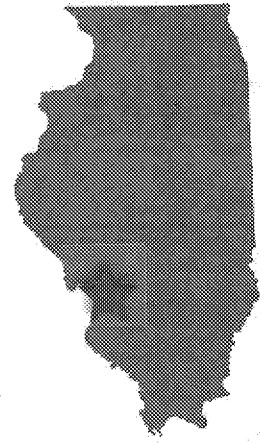


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# The History

Centreville is a city in St. Clair County Illinois. The city has a total area of 4.29 square miles. Centreville is the poorest city in the state of Illinois, as well as one of the poorest cities in the nation.



## TIMELINE

*This timeline contains a number of important events regarding Centreville flooding and sewage, but is not intended and should not be considered as a comprehensive timeline of relevant events.*

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**MAYOR MARIUS JACKSON**

**6 ALDERMEN**

**4 OTHER CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS**

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**POPULATION: 5,094**

**UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 9.6%**

**POVERTY RATE: 48.1%**

**1800**

**1850:** French and German farmers and railroad workers populate the 'Centreville Station' area.

**1890:** The Illinois Central Railroad buys tracks around Centreville.

**1900**

**1903:** The Great Flood of 1903 brings forward the proposition of the Metro-East Sanitary District Levees and the proposition is carried out.

**1910**

**1910:** Centreville is incorporated into a township with one village.

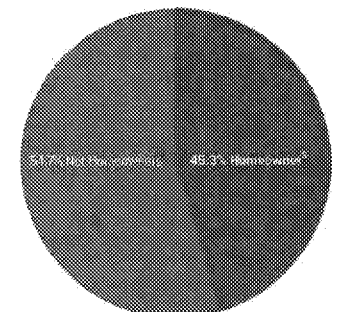
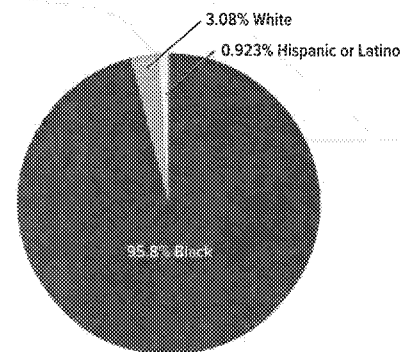
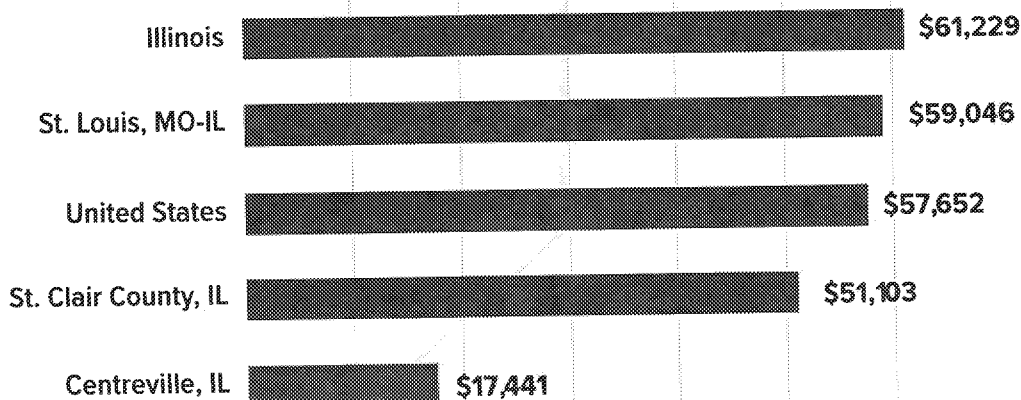
**1950**

**1957:** The City of Centreville is incorporated.

**1960**

**1969:** Centreville Township's initial sewage system construction plan is completed, 20 years after the plan's proposal.

Median Household Income



## CITY/TOWNSHIP OF CENTREVILLE

The City/Township of Centreville have responsibilities for wastewater and stormwater services in various sections of the Centreville township/city area.

## COMMONFIELDS OF CAHOKIA PUBLIC WATER DISTRICT

A sanitary sewer system that services approximately 5 square miles of land, serving a population of approximately 8,100 residents.

The sanitary sewer system is funded by a utility fee. The utility fee provides a dedicated source of funds for the operation, maintenance, rehabilitation, and improvement of the District's sanitary sewer system.

*From Commonfields of Cahokia Public Water District Sanitary Sewer System Capacity, Management, Operation and Maintenance (CMOM) Program, August 2014*

## AMERICAN BOTTOMS

### Vision & Mission

We will produce a high quality wastewater effluent to protect our nation's water resources both today and for future generations.

### History

The American Bottoms Wastewater Treatment Plant services East St. Louis, the Village of Cahokia, the Village of Sauget, parts of Alorton, Centreville, and Belleville, and areas in Centreville Township served by the Commonfields of Cahokia Public Water District.

Each community is responsible for the operation, repair, and maintenance of its own sewer system.

[www.americanbottoms.com](http://www.americanbottoms.com)

1970

**1976:** Commonfields of Cahokia Public Water District buys Centreville Township's sewage system and continues to manage both tap water and wastewater for the Township.

1980

**1986:** The American Bottoms Wastewater Treatment Plant is opened to treat municipal wastewater from surrounding municipalities, including parts of the City and Township of Centreville.

**1988–90:** Problems with the East St. Louis sewer system, to which Centreville's sewer system is tied, make national news. U.S. EPA sues East St. Louis for misuse of federal sewer money; St. Clair County State's Attorney and East Side Health District sue City for sewage failures.

1990

**1993:** A year of heavy flooding greatly damages the St. Louis area levees and causes damage to local sewer systems.

**1994:** East St. Louis public works director blames flooding impacting East St. Louis, Centreville and Washington Park partly on failure to clean and dredge Harding Ditch.

2000

**2002:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers notifies then Mayor Seaberry that I-255 is a barrier to water flow between the 63rd Street area of Centreville and Harding Ditch.

**2003:** The takeover of the Centreville-Alorton Sewer District by Commonfields of Cahokia is announced, along with the need for extensive emergency repairs due to failure to clean and grease sewer pumps.

**2007:** FEMA notifies the Metro East levee district that the levees will lose accreditation unless significant problems with underseepage and other issues are addressed.

**2009:** Illinois EPA issues plan identifying Harding Ditch as failing to meet water quality standards for fecal coliform.

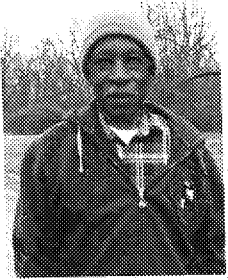
2010

**2013:** Heavy rainfall and flooding results in emergency rescue of six families in neighborhood of 40-45 homes off of State Street near the I-255 exit.

**2019:** St. Clair County again recognizes that 'runoff originating from the bluff areas to the east of the American Bottoms contribute [sic] markedly to flooding, ponding, and soil wetness.'

# The Residents

## VITTORIO BLAYLOCK



Mr Blaylock's frustration with the ever-present flooding in Centreville stems from the huge cost it has placed on him and the community he loves. In 2015, to fix the damage caused by frequent flooding, he had all of his plumbing redone at a cost that now equals the total

value of his home. Indeed, Mr Blaylock has deep roots in Centreville: his father lived across the street for over 30 years until his passing and Blaylock himself moved in over 20 years ago. Over the years, he improved his house and the surrounding area, but emphasises that in recent years, residents feel powerless to stop the water. Not without many attempts; Mr Blaylock became a Centreville Township Precinct Committeeman in 2014 to seek change in the community. What continues is his love for his town and animals. Horses, rabbits and chickens keep Mr Blaylock company as he seeks to stay put amongst friends and family

*The lack of clean water or a functioning sanitary system in Centreville has left residents living in, as Vittorio Blaylock puts it, "Third World" conditions."*



## WALTER BYRD



Retired resident Mr Byrd has a boat in front of his property to rescue neighbors who can't escape their homes during bad flood events. But this hasn't been worst of his worries; sewage water started backing up in his toilet six years ago. "I spent 37 years working in sewers and then I

have to put my family through it?" He has tried to keep the standing sewage water at bay but the ditches in front of his home attract mosquitoes so big that he and his family no longer open windows in the summer. The cost of A/C racks up thousands of dollars of debt. Not only has he attempted to fix issues with his home by raising its foundations, but also for his neighbour by putting in a check valve to keep sewage at bay. In 1996, he built the house with his own retirement money to move into a quiet community-oriented neighborhood with his whole family. He's angry that the sewer failure has gotten so bad that both his neighbours have already moved out.





## MICHAEL McNEAL

**"After the white folks moved, they stopped doing stuff out here."**

That was in the late seventies. Infrastructural problems have gotten worse such that Mr McNeal's home in Centreville now worth less than what he bought it for over 40 years ago. Over the years, he estimates he has spent over \$15,000 on flood and sewer repairs to prevent sewage backing up in his toilet and bathtub. It continues to happen yet there's little to no response when he calls for help from water management companies.

## HAZEL LEFLORE

The feeling of being left behind despite complaints and town-hall meetings is a common one amongst Centreville residents, particularly for long-time resident Hazel Leflore. "We have been here for 42 years so I can't even tell you the amount of times we've called." She remembers that when her family was the first black family to move into Centreville, it was a wonderful place to live. In her view, nothing was as unpleasant as the stench of sewage that now leaks in her yard.

**When flooding happens the sewage mixes with "water [that] runs across the street into our yard and fills up the trench."**

Even though her house is raised from street level, the constant smell means she and her husband no longer enjoy their yard. But Centreville's safety makes her want to stay and see the problem fixed: in all the time that she lived there, she has never needed to call the police.



# The Problem

## FOR DECADES...

Pump stations that are designed to pump sewage away from homes and neighborhoods are barely functional and others are non-functional or not turned on which leads to raw sewage leaking into the streets and yards of residents

A typical rainy day in any other part of town creates dangerous flash flooding for residents of Centreville that can get over 2 feet high and can take 2-7 days to recede.

These rain events not only create flash flooding but push sewage throughout parts of the Centreville community.

Sewage backs up into bathtubs, toilets and laundry rooms in residents' homes; these back-ups often occur without the triggering event of a rainy day. This means many residents are stuck living in conditions with raw sewage lingering in ditches surrounding their properties, front steps, streets, yards, etc.

Residents are often told there is nowhere to pump the excess sewage and stormwater because the sewers are full.





## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF FLOODING AND SEWAGE LEAKS?

Standing water and sewage and accompanying smell attracts mosquitoes that may be carrying diseases;

Possible health risks to years of exposure to raw sewage and/or mosquitoes feeding from the sewage contaminated surface water;

The foul smell of sewage makes many residents unable to utilize their yards;

Constant overflow of sewage creates concern for contamination of soil due to sewage which means many residents cannot do simple things like plant gardens;

Reduced quality of life; cannot have guests over due to standing water and/or sewage, inability to leave home due to depth of water outside of home;

Fear of dying in the home; some residents cannot swim and/or are older and previous rain events have required them to be rescued by boat. This has made some Centreville residents fearful the more it rains and the higher the water gets;

Extensive property damage, including: foundation cracks, buckling bathroom and living room floors due to water constantly inundating the homes, collapsing front porches, hot water heaters and furnaces taken out by stormwater and much more damage residents have sustained over the years;

Above-average to excessive bills from multiple municipal companies, despite inadequate or no services. Some residents have had services turned off and/or liens placed on their properties;

Decreasing property values;

Inability to obtain home improvement loans

## HOW HAVE RESIDENTS ATTEMPTED TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS?

Each resident we have spoken to has respectively, spent thousands of dollars before and after rain events and sewage overflows to make their homes livable.

This includes: some residents have replaced all piping in their homes, numerous calls to the local plumbers to ensure their lines are clear, multiple times replacing flooring over and over in their homes, putting limestone and ammonia down all around their homes to rid the smell of sewage. Many residents worry that they are likely living with mold in their homes because of the constant moisture. In some homes, you can see it.

Collectively, over the years, residents have complained to the following entities about these conditions:

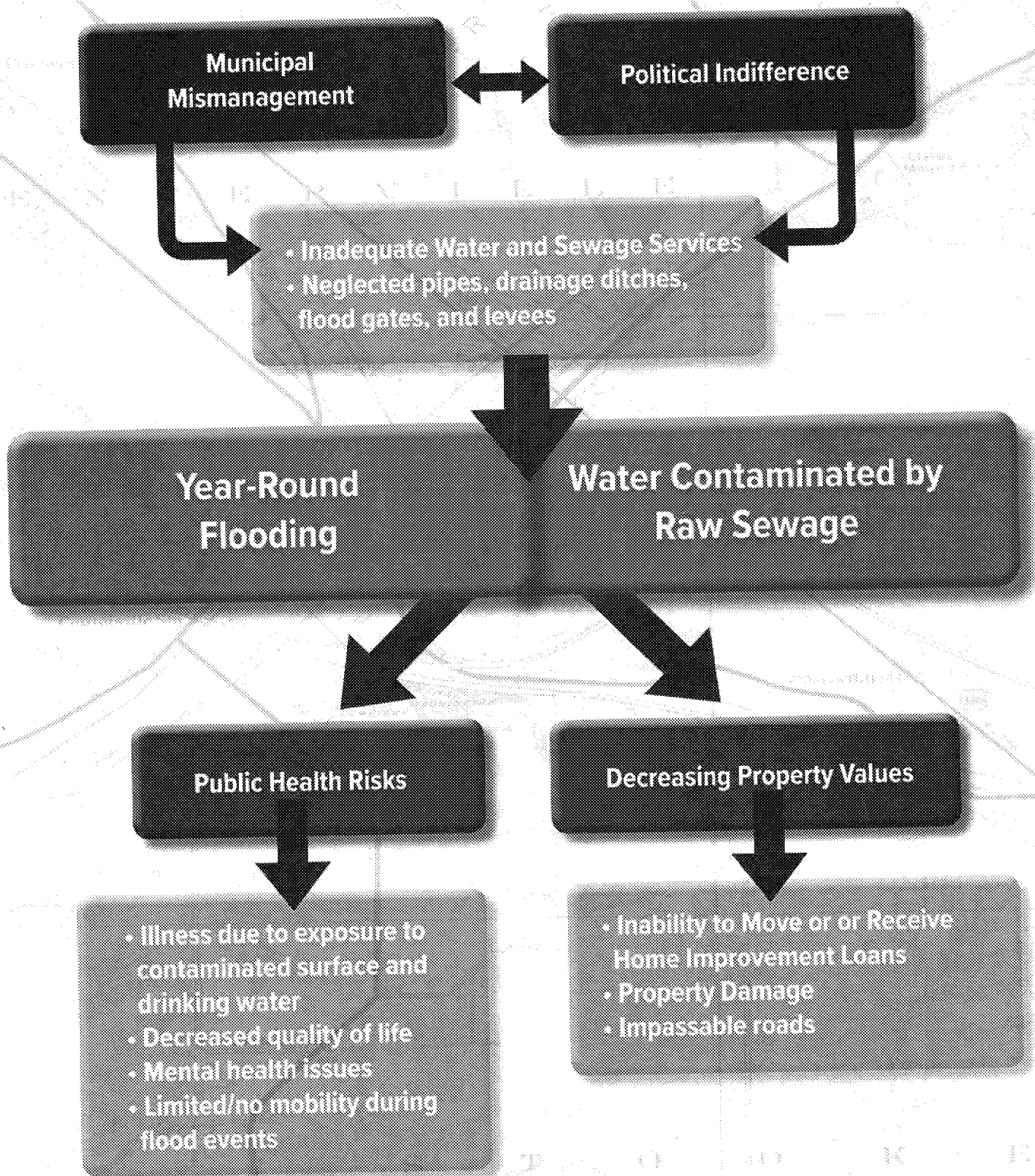
*City of Centreville and also attended town hall meetings at City of Centreville;*

*Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Eastside Health District (St. Clair County, Illinois Public Health Department)*

*Commonfields of Cahokia*

To date, the conditions for the Centreville residents remain the same.

# Findings & Risks



# Next Steps

## ► WATER TESTING

- Continue drinking water testing for bacteria

## ► HISTORICAL DATA ANALYSIS

- Compiling decades of sewage and flooding issue documentation from municipalities and utilities companies
- Archival research on the development of Centreville's water infrastructure

## ► PUBLIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT

- Assess major health concerns and how residents are interacting with the healthcare system.
- Identify key stakeholders to learn more about the state of healthcare access.

## ► LEGAL ACTION

- Attorneys from Equity Legal Services, Metropolitan St. Louis Equal Housing and Opportunity Council, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Earthjustice will continue to interview residents and explore options for legal action.

## ► COMMUNITY BUILDING

- Organization of a Centreville Resident Committee
- Bottled water drive to address residents' concerns of possible drinking water contamination due to sewage in surface water.

## Timeline Sources

Timeline information from 1940–1990 can be found in 1992 Final Official Statement prepared by Bernardi Securities under authority of Commonfields. Most information comes from the District Manager: Joseph LiVigni. 1992 Board Chairman Robert Bregman was the same chairman that oversaw the 1976 sale of Centreville's sewer system.

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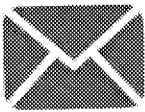


# What You Can Do



## REPORT FLOODING & SEWAGE ISSUES

- CENTREVILLE RESIDENT HOTLINE: 314-325-2230
- Commonfields of Cahokia  
Water & Sewer Department (618) 332-1222



## CONTACT EQUITY LEGAL SERVICES

[nnelson@equitylegalservices.com](mailto:nnelson@equitylegalservices.com)  
618-693-9800



## JOIN THE CENTREVILLE RESIDENT COMMITTEE

Meetings held at Centreville Church of Christ, 7435 Old Missouri, Centreville, IL 62207 Contact Nicole Nelson or Kalila Jackson for next date and time.

Work in partnership with fellow residents to find resolutions to flooding and sewage issues and hold government officials and utility companies accountable.



## DONATE

To donate to support our work with the residents in Centreville, Illinois, visit Equity Legal Services, Inc. at [www.equitylegalservices.org](http://www.equitylegalservices.org) or visit Metropolitan St. Louis Equal Housing and Opportunity Council at <https://ehocstl.org>

To ship or drop-off bottled water for the residents in Centreville, Illinois because of concerns related to drinking water quality, send to: **The Urban League of Metro St. Louis-St. Clair County Operations, 10220 Lincoln Trails, Fairview Heights, Illinois 62208.**

To donate online for bottled water for the residents of Centreville, please visit <https://www.ulstl.com>. For inquiries about cash or check donations for bottled water, please call the Urban League of Metro St. Louis at **618-274-1150**.